LINCOLN CHAFEE
U.S. SENATOR
RHODE ISLAND

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, October 06, 2003

CONTACT: Stephen Hourahan
202-224-6167

SENATOR CHAFEE APPLAUDS BRAYTON POINT PERMIT

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senator Lincoln Chafee reacted to news that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's New England Office and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection today issued a new water discharge permit for the Brayton Point Station power plant. The new permit will require substantial reductions in the negative environmental impact that the Somerset, MA facility has on Mount Hope Bay.

"I applaud EPA for holding its ground and releasing a final Clean Water Act permit for Brayton Point Station that promises substantial benefits for the ecosystems of Mount Hope Bay and Narragansett Bay. By requiring Brayton Point Station to move to a closed-cycle cooling system, EPA has laid the foundation for the recovery of winter flounder and other marine life, in which we have seen a dramatic collapse over the past 20 years, Chafee said. "I also commend EPA and the States of Rhode Island and Massachusetts for their hard work over the past 14 months in reviewing the comments of public and private interests regarding the draft permit. They have examined all of the evidence in a deliberative, thoughtful manner and have gone to great lengths to make sure that the new regulations are based on sound science. This announcement is a very important step forward in the process, and I look forward to the permit's implementation," Chafee continued.

The jointly issued permit will substantially limit the power plant's water withdrawals from the bay and heated discharges back into the bay. The fossil-fuel burning power plant, owned by US Gen New England, a subsidiary of the PG&E National Energy Group, currently withdraws up to one billion gallons of water a day from Mount Hope Bay and discharges it back into the bay at a much higher temperature.

- more -

Withdrawals and discharges such as these require a permit under the federal Clean Water Act, which was enacted in 1972 to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of U.S. waters.

The new permit specifically requires that the power plant:

- Reduce its annual heat discharge to the estuary by 96 percent from 42 trillion BTUs (British Thermal Units) per year to 1.7 trillion BTUs per year.

- Reduce its water withdrawal from the bay by 94 percent, from an average flow of nearly one billion gallons per day to 56 million gallons per day.

Mount Hope Bay, which is bordered by Massachusetts and Rhode Island, is an important part of the Narragansett Bay estuary, a designated estuary of national environmental significance. At one time, Mount Hope Bay was a productive fish nursery area and an excellent habitat for fish, including popular commercial and recreational fish such as winter flounder and tautog.

The Brayton Point power plant relies on a once-through cooling system in which bay water is circulated through the plant's cooling system, heated to high temperature, and discharged back into the bay at temperatures up to 30 degrees warmer. These discharges drastically alter the thermal profile of the water body, making the bay at times inhospitable to native fish species and interfering with normal fish migration. In addition, the bay water used for cooling contains billions of fish eggs, larvae and baby fish, most or all of which are destroyed when they are pulled into the facility and subjected to severe physical and chemical impacts as well as extreme water temperatures.

Subsequently, many fish populations in Mount Hope Bay have collapsed. Others have declined to drastically low levels, including winter flounder and tautog, as well as species that are not economically significant such as hogchoker and windowpane. Strict fishing restrictions on recreational and commercial fishing in Mount Hope Bay have been in place for many years, but the fishery has not recovered.

# # #